

# Spirit Waters



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# Introduction

## A Creation Story and a Ritual Guide

In her recent book, *The White Shaman Mural*, archeologist Dr. Carolyn E. Boyd suggests that the White Shaman Mural depicts the Huichol creation myth, detailing the birth of the sun and the birth of peyote, which is small cactus sacred to the Huichol people. Long ago the ancestors lived in a watery underworld that was filled with darkness. One day a group of pilgrims followed a deer on a journey that took them to the east. The five pilgrims, carrying torches pursued the deer through the underworld up into the world above, where the deer slew itself and became the sacred peyote cactus, bringing life to the earth.

The mural also serves as a guide for the ritual reenactment of that same creation myth, the peyote pilgrimage. Dr. Boyd has drawn striking comparisons between the images depicted in the mural and the peyote pilgrimage practiced by modern day Huichol people in Northern Mexico and Texas. The mural contains images of slain deer, peyote buds, five human like figures carrying torches and other references to the legends.



## The Four Fountain Springs

Gary Perez, a descendant of the Coahuiltecan and researcher has proposed that the White Shaman Mural also functions as a map of the lands north of the Pecos River and a 4,295 year calendar used to follow celestial events. One of the glyphs contained in the mural may represent the four fountain springs of the Coahuiltecan creation story; Comal Springs, Barton Springs, San Marcos Springs and San Antonio Springs. Modern Coahuiltecan People continue the traditional annual pilgrimage across Texas during which participants gather water from each fountain spring as part of a peyote pilgrimage and ritual.

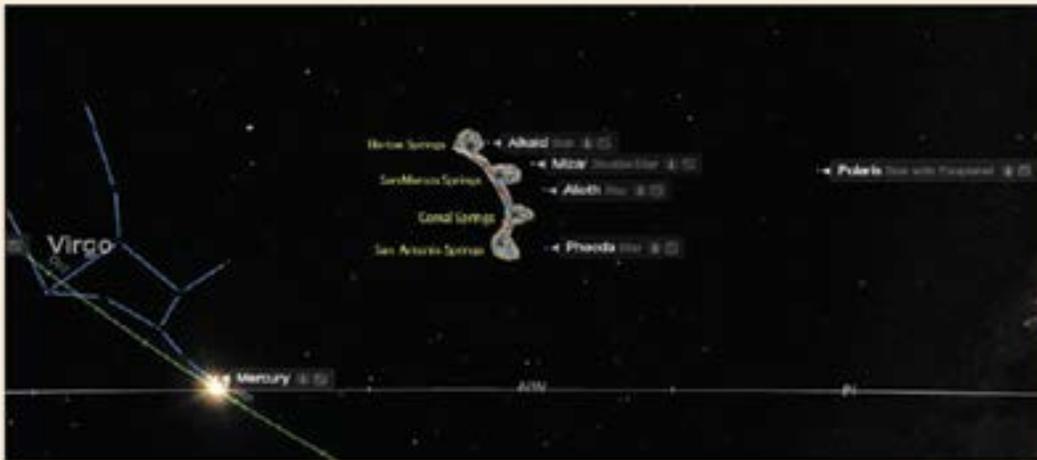
Comparison of a four pointed crescent shaped glyph from the mural and the geographic relation of the four major Texas springs is compelling. This same alignment can be seen in the tail of the constellation Ursa Major during the summer solstice as the sky mirrors the land. Considering the enduring importance of the fountain springs to Coahuiltecan tradition and the significant archeological evidence of early Native American habitation near each spring, it is very likely that the early peoples of the Lower Pecos chose to depict the springs in their rock art.



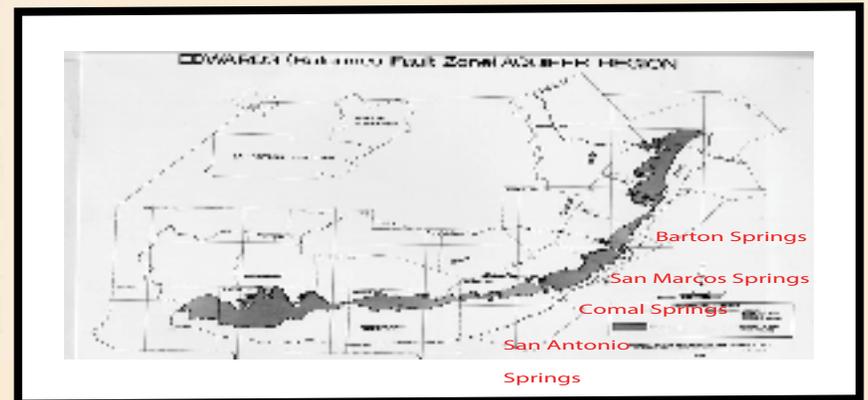
The image depicting the fountain springs



The glyph aligned with G.I.S point for each spring. *Image by Andrew May 2011*



Four of the stars that make up the tail of the "Big Bear" constellation shown next to the spring glyph found in the rock art.



The geographic relationship of the springs.



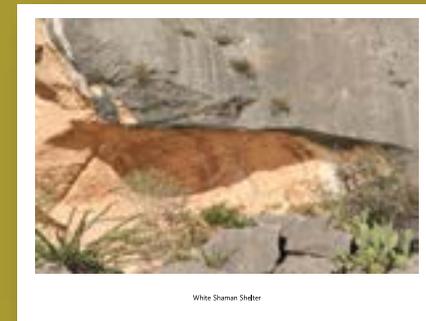
# The White Shaman Mural



The White Shaman Mural is a twenty-six foot long collection of pictographs painted on the west facing wall of a rock shelter upriver from the Pecos River Bridge. It was produced by hunter-gatherers living in the Lower Pecos canyonlands of Southwest Texas and Coahuila, Mexico. It is approximately 2,000 to 2,500 years ago. The mural was named after a human like figure found at its center that is predominantly white in color.



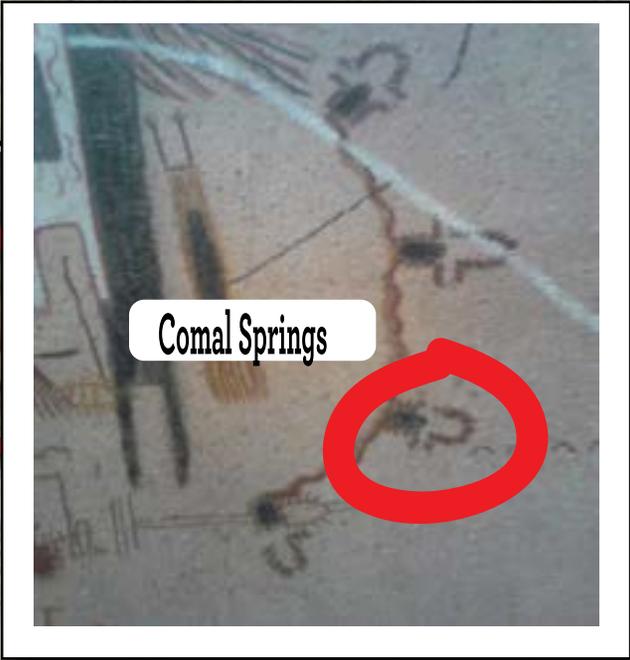
The pictographs of the White Shaman Mural belong to the Pecos River Style, a 4,000 year old form of rock art which depicts human and animal like figures with a combination of red, yellow, black and white colors. More than two hundred other examples of the Pecos River style rock art have been found in rock shelters along the confluence of the Pecos and the Rio Grande Rivers and another thirty-five in Coahuila Mexico.



White Shaman Shelter

Over the past half century archeologists and anthropologists have attempted to interpret the significance of the mural and its complex imagery. While interpretations vary, most agree that the images relate to the religious practices of the people of the Pecos River Valley.

# Comal Springs



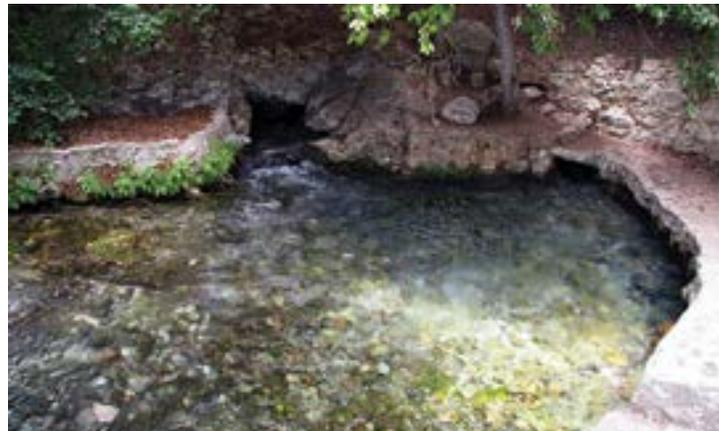


## The Headwaters

Comal Springs are the the headwaters of the Comal River and are the largest of the four fountain springs. Early Native Americans referred to the springs as Conaqueyadesta, which means "where the river has it source." European settlers called it "Las Fontanas" which simply means the springs. Comal Springs are located in Landa Park in New Braunfels and remain a popular spot for swimming, tubing, barbecuing, and picnicking.



Comal Springs



Comal Springs

Comal Springs

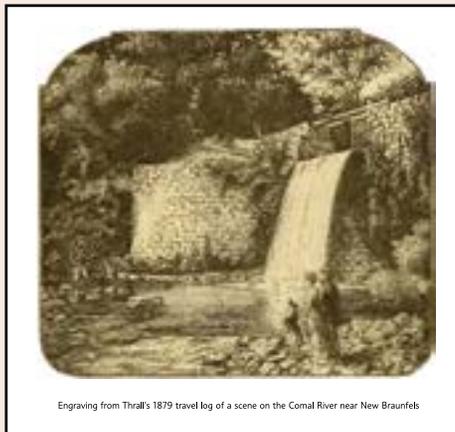


## Las Fontanas



One early European explorer, Juan Espinoza, described his impression of Comal Springs in 1716.

*"Soon we reached the passage of the Guadalupe which is made of gravel and is very wide. Groves of inexpressible beauty are found in this vicinity. We stopped at the other bank of the river in a little clearing surrounded by trees, and contiguous to said river. The waters of the Guadalupe are clear, crystal and so abundant that it seemed almost incredible to us that its source arose so near. Composing this river are three principal springs of water which, together with other smaller ones, unite as soon as they begin to flow. There the growth of the walnut trees competes with the poplars. All are crowned by the wild grapevines, which climb up their trunks. Willow trees beautified the region of this river with their luxuriant foliage and there was a great variety of plants. It makes a delightful grove for recreation, and the enjoyment of the melodious songs of different birds."*



Engraving from Thrall's 1879 travel log of a scene on the Comal River near New Braunfels

## The Headwaters at the Comal

The Headwaters at the Comal, an environmental conservation and cultural history organization, has been conducting an ongoing archeological excavation at Comal Springs since 2014. Archeologists have found evidence of early human occupation, including large numbers of stone tools, animal bones, pottery fragments, and charred rocks from the remains of old fire pits.



Dart Point between 2,000-3,000 years old found at the Headwaters Site.



Prehistoric cooking hearth found at the Headwaters Site.



# San Antonio Springs



San Antonio Springs

## The Blue Hole

San Antonio Springs are made up of many large and small springs outlets, the largest spring is known as The Blue Hole. These springs make up the headwaters of the San Antonio River and are part of the Headwaters Sanctuary Nature Preserve, established by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. The Blue Hole holds significant religious and cultural relevance to Native American groups. The Olmos Basin area has been the site of human occupancy dating back thousands of years. Paleo-Indian projectile points over 11,000 years old have been found along with other evidence of human activity.



Blue Hole



Blue Hole



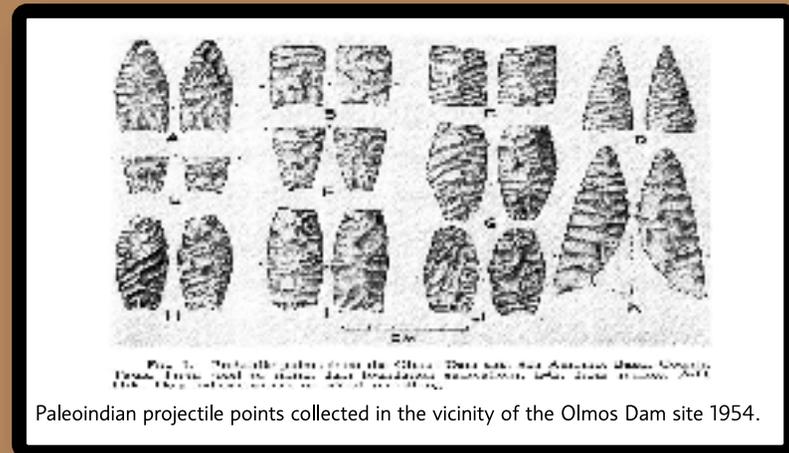
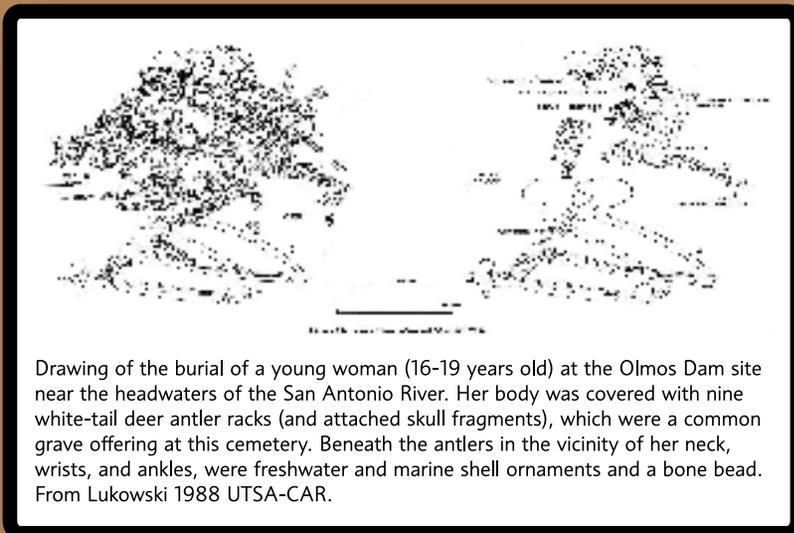
## Legend of the Panther and Cormorant

The Payaya were a nomadic Coahuiltecan band. They had a legend about how life came to be in the area around San Antonio Springs. The story tells that there was once a spirit named Yanguana who took the form of a blue panther and lived in the Blue Hole. One day a cormorant flew into the hole. When the bird flew back out, it opened its wings and water from the Blue Hole fell across the land giving life to the region.



## Olmos Dam Site

There are several archeological sites in the Olmos Basin area. The most important of these is the Olmos Dam site which is located on the west bank of Olmos Creek. The site contains artifacts such as arrowheads, stone tools, and a cemetery that dates between 2,000 and 2,250 BCE. Originally discovered in the 1920's, the site was not thoroughly excavated until the 1970's. The archeological team documented thirteen burials which were accompanied by offerings which included shell ornaments, bone and stone artifacts, as well as white-tail deer antlers.



## Peyote Ritual at the Olmos Basin

Archeologist C. D. "Dave" Orcharge of McQueeney, Texas encountered a group of Poncha Indians of Oklahoma performing a peyote ritual at the Olmos Basin in April 1924. This is a transcript of his experience recorded in March 1976 for Incarnate World College.

*"They went over to the big spring, sat down, rolled a cigarette, smoked, then came back and drank coffee. They then went to the west side of a group of liveoak trees. At about four to six feet above the ground level, there was a large borl where groups of hand-forged nails had been pounded in the shape of a cross. The Indians pounded four more nails in. They said that every collecting season on their trip from Poncha City, Oklahoma to the Laredo territory, at places on the way, they had to stop and perform different ceremonies; but that this at Olmos was one of the most imortant. They said it was a purificantion and collection ceremony , that from then on, they had to be absolutely pure, both bodily and mentaly before they could do any collecting of 'father peyote.'"*





# Barton Springs





## The Soul of Austin

Barton Springs refers to the four springs found in Zilker Park which lies at the heart of Austin, Texas. The largest spring, Parthenia, supplies water to Barton Springs pool which has been in operation since the 1920's. Native American artifacts found at multiple sites around the springs demonstrate their historic importance. Today Barton Springs continues its spiritual legacy as Austin residents gather there to swim and howl as they celebrate the return of the full moon. It is a favored location for weddings, baptisms, and blessings.



Barton Springs



Eliza Springs



## Legend of the Rainbow and the Springs

Major Ransom, an early resident of Austin, recorded a Native American legend about the creation of Barton Springs.

*"A rainbow was driven by the Great Spirit with so much force against the rock, to shiver it asunder; where Barton's celebrated springs gushed forth from the mountain side, and a portion of the brilliant bow, having mingled with the waters of the fountain, caused the beautiful prismatic colors reflected from the depths of its waters."*

Frank Brown Annals of Travis County and the City of Austin (From the Earliest Times to the Close of 1875): Vol 2



Old Mill Springs - Sunken Gardens

## The Vara Daniel Site

There have been several archeological excavations near Barton Springs in Zilker Park since 1928. In 2003 an excavation of the rugby fields north of the springs, known as the Vara Daniel site. The excavation uncovered evidence of early human occupation including animal bone fragments, fire cracked rocks, and stone tools.



## Spirit Waters

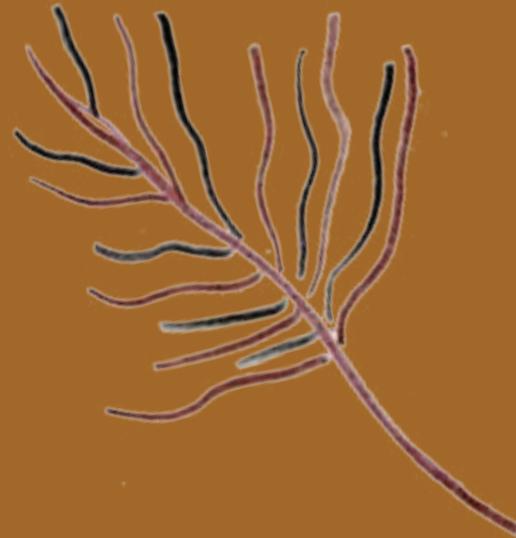
Like the other four fountain springs of Texas, Barton Springs remains a site of active spiritual practice. Once a year, in September, descendants of the Coahuiltecan people conduct a water gathering ceremony at Eliza Springs, one of the four springs at Bartons. Women make an offering of smoke to the water accompanied by song and drumming. This is the first of the four fountain springs on the route of the annual pilgrimage.



Illustration of a group of women performing a water gathering ceremony at Eliza Springs

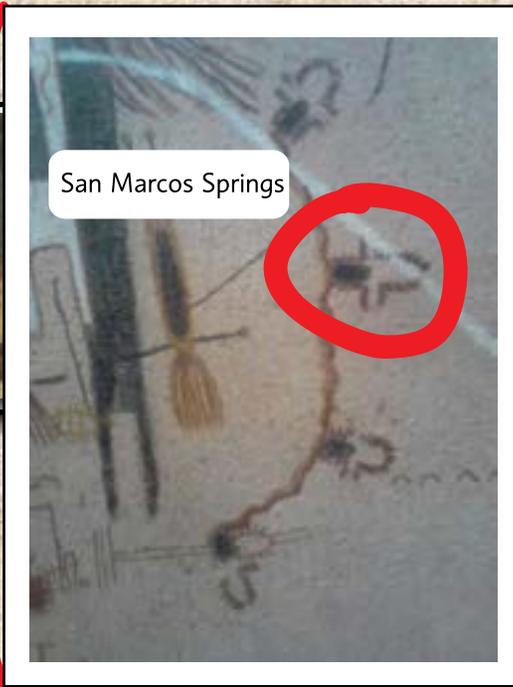


Illustration of a woman performing a water gathering ceremony at Eliza Springs





# San Marcos Springs



## Spirit Waters

San Marcos Springs is the second largest cluster of natural springs in Texas. The area surrounding the springs is one of the oldest continually inhabited sites in North America. It has served as a spiritual site for Native American tribes, a watering hole for early European settlers, an amusement park, and is currently an environmental education facility.



San Marcos Springs. Early explores recounted that the water was fifteen to twenty feet deep yet so strong the ebullition of the springs was two to three feet above the surface



## Creation Site of the Coahuiltecan Indian Tribes



The San Marcos Springs are central to the spirituality of Native tribes in south central Texas, serving as both the site of creation in Coahuiltecan legend and a stop along a sacred pilgrimage still practiced today.

According to the Coahuiltecan creation story or Na Pako in the Coahuiltecan language, at the dawn of time, the ancestors lived beneath the earth in a watery underworld towards the west. They were not yet people but spirits. One day a group of pilgrims knew they must journey east in search of the mountain where the sun would rise for the first time, which in some traditions is at Twin Buttes near San Angelo, Texas. They were led through the underworld by a deer until they emerged into the world as spirits from the fountain springs of San Marcos.

Each pilgrim carried two torches to help the sun rise. In a single moment at the end of the hunt the deer sacrificed itself, the sun rose, and the pilgrims became human.

Members of the Coahuiltecan peoples conduct an annual pilgrimage to the four sacred springs of Texas to collect Yanguana or spirit waters. Some believe that the White Shaman Mural depicts San Marcos and other Edwards Aquifer springs and that the mural serves as a map and guide for the pilgrimage.



Artist's interpretation of Lower Pecos natives on a sacred pilgrimage to the Edwards springs sites  
Artist Susan Dunis 2014

## Spring Lake Archeological Site

Archeological research suggests that San Marcos Springs may be one of the oldest continually inhabited sites in North America. Since the 1970's, excavations have yielded evidence that humans have lived around the Spring Lake area for more than 12,000 years. Recently the Spring Lake Data Recovery Project has uncovered an impressive array of artifacts. Along with five separate clusters of of small earth ovens, over 131,000 stone artifacts have been cataloged, including grinding tools, arrowheads, and spear heads. Bone fragments, showing signs of butchering and cooking, include deer, bison and smaller game such as rodents, rabbits, birds, turtles, snakes, and fish were found. Archeologists uncovered beads made of bone, shell, and stone as well as ceramic fragments from pots, bottles, and jars.



Paleoindian dart points



Bone and shell beads